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Caṇḍāla Sutta

The Discourse to the Outcaste | A 5.175
Theme: The qualities of a true lay follower
Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2014

1 Introduction

1.1 The Caṇḍāla Sutta (A 5.175) is a short discourse on the qualities of a false lay follower and of a true lay follower. The teachings are brief, and meant as a sort of preliminary list of qualities that a lay follower should avoid [§1] and should cultivate [§2]. The qualities in this brief list are elaborated in a number of other discourses [1.2].

1.2 A list of 7 “causes of a lay follower’s decline,” incorporating the 5 qualities here, are found in **the Parihāna Sutta** (A 7.29),¹ also called Hani Sutta, and **the (Upāsaka) Parābhava Sutta** (A 7.31).² These two Suttas have this identical list of 7 causes of a lay follower’s decline, namely:

- (1) He fails to see the monks.
- (2) He neglects to hear the true Dharma.
- (3) He does not train in what is related to moral virtue.
- (4) He has often lacks faith in the monks, whether elder, middling or new.
- (5) He listens to the Dharma with a hostile mind, seeking faults.
- (6) He seeks the giftworthy outside the Teaching and
- (7) there gives his priority.

It should be noted here that “monks” here refers only to renunciants who keep to the Vinaya and are properly trained and experienced in the Dharma. Monastics who have broken the grave rules (*pārājika*)³ are automatically no more monastics in the true sense of the word. In this same spirit of early Buddhism, we can say that “monk” (*bhikkhu*) also refers anyone who meditates,⁴ and by extension, one who teaches the Dharma in accordance with the Dharma. However, where there are morally virtuous monastics, they should be naturally be given priority and due respect.

2 The false lay follower

2.0 The Caṇḍāla Sutta (A 5.175) speaks of a false lay follower—called an outcaste follower (*upāsaka, caṇḍāla*), a stained layman (*upāsaka, mala*), a low layman (*upāsaka, paṭikiṭṭho*)—in the following manner:

- (1) He lacks faith.
- (2) He is not morally virtuous.
- (3) He believes in rituals to invoke luck.

¹ A 7.29/4:245 f.

² A 7.31/4:26 f. See also **Kiñci Saṅkhāra S** (A 6.93) + SD 12.14 (2).

³ When a **monk** breaks any of the 4 grave rules, he is immediately and automatically “defeated” (*pārājika*). The 4 rules are: (1) any kind of sexual intercourse, or consent to it (V 3:23,33-36); (2) taking the not-given (as little as a small local coin), or getting someone else to do it (V 3:46,16-20); (3) killing a human being, making someone do it, or praising killing (incl suicide) (V 3:73,10-16); and (4) claiming to powers that one does not really have (V 3:109, 21-27). For a **nun**, besides these 4, the additional 4 heavy rules apply: (5) letting her body (anywhere between the shoulders and the knees) be handled sexually (V 4:213,34-38); (6) concealing the fact of the breaking of a heavy rule (V 4:216,31-17,2); (7) persisting in imitating or condoning a suspended monastic despite being admonished by the sangha not to do so thrice (V 4:418,14-25); (8) holding a man’s hand with sexual intent or meeting in a secret place for such a purpose (V 4:220,33-221,4). For details, see such books as Ariyesako, *The Bhikkhus’ Rules: A guide for laypeople*, 1998: <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/modern/ariyesako/layguide.html>.

⁴ Buddhaghosa, commenting on “a monk” (*bhikkhu*) in **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10) and elsewhere says that it “may refer to either an ordained monastic or anyone who is meditating” (DA 3:756; MA 1:241; VbA 216 f; cf SnA 251). See SD 13.1 (3.1.1).

- (4) He relies on luck, not on karma.
 (5) He seeks the gift-worthy outside the Teaching and gives his priority there. [§1]

2.1 LACK OF FAITH. The false lay follower's lack of faith comes from his unwillingness or inability to see the goodness of the Dharma because of his worldly preoccupations and distractions. His lack of interest in the Dharma makes him habitually measure Buddhism and Buddhists in terms of their status, wealth, power and palpable gains for himself.

In other words, he sees no real joy in the Dharma (and within himself), and is caught up with the idea of what he can "have," instead of the good that he can *be*. Buddhism to him is merely a routine of attending activities featuring famous teachers and prominent figures, and being seen with the "right" crowd.

2.2 LACK OF MORAL VIRTUE. The false lay follower lacks moral virtue arises from his not really understanding the precepts and the nature of personal accountability. Since he lacks faith in the Dharma, he feels no real joy in it. As a rule, he keeps his daily life alienated from the Dharma,⁵ so that it is only a seasonal and isolated activity. Any sense of moral virtue is only momentary, as he is easily troubled or traumatized by challenges and problems, and acts mostly on the notion that the end justifies the means. As a rule, he has no sense of truth or honesty, so that what he says or does is essentially motivated by what he feels would work for him.

2.3 BELIEF IN LUCK, OMENS AND RITUALS. This means that a false lay follower, as a rule, depends on some outside agency for what he sees as personal success and wealth. He also tends to blame his problems on others and often on a single person or cause, rather than examining the conditions for his weakness and failure. He furtively holds unbuddhist and false beliefs, and is willing to try even non-Buddhist strategies if he thinks it will work for him.

The term *kotūhala,maṅgala* ("luck, omen and rituals") [§2(5)] resolves as *kotūhala* (vl *kutūhala*), "noisiness, excitement, curiosity" and *maṅgala*, "auspiciousness, luck." *Kotūhala* also refers to "strange and noisy rituals." As such, *kotūhala,maṅgala* may also be translated as "rituals and luck." Following such superstitions is synonymous with "attachment to rituals and vows" (*sīla-b,bata parāmāsa*), one of the 3 mental fetters to be broken by a streamwinner.⁶

2.4 ACTS ON LUCK, NOT KARMA. Since a false lay follower lack Dharma understanding and spirituality, when he is faced with difficulties, he can only rely of worldly wisdom and management skills. Since he also lacks compassion, he is unable to heal those who are troubled or in need of succour. He is likely to take the easy way out when someone comes to him with a problem often by simply saying, "It's all right!" without really helping. The real reason is that he is unwilling or unable to help others who need it.

He tends to regard the failures and problems of others as a result of their own "bad karma." He sees success, wealth, status and power in others (both monastic and lay) as signs of "good karma," and so is attracted to them. He measures other by what and how much he can get out of them. His view of the precepts and morality is an "economic" one (based on lust, hate, delusion or fear). In this sense, his is a Buddhism of the "right" crowd and worldliness.⁷

⁵ In the psychology of unconscious defence mechanisms, this is known as "atonement," eg. after habitually broken the precepts or being guilt-ridden by some act, he makes expensive and improper gifts to the monks or nuns. On defence mechanisms, see SD 24.10b (2).

⁶ That is, the 2nd "mental fetter" (*saṃyojanā*); the other two fetters broken by the streamwinner are (1) self-identity view (*sakkāya,diṭṭhi*) (the notion that one or all the 5 aggregates constitute one's self) and (3) spiritual doubt (*vīcīkicchā*). On the 10 fetters, see M 22,34 n in SD 3.13.

⁷ For example, he has no qualms about extramarital affairs, breaking up relationships, indulging in illegal or immoral practices (for example, lying is almost second nature to him), and his idea of right and wrong depends on how he looks in the public eye. On the wholesome qualities and duties of a lay follower, see **Sigāl'ovāda S** (D 31), SD 4.1.

3 The true lay follower

3.1 QUALITIES OF A TRUE LAY FOLLOWER. The Caṇḍāla Sutta then defines a true lay follower—called a jewel layman (*upāsaka, ratana*), a lotus layman (*upāsaka, paduma*), a white-lotus layman (*upāsaka, puṇḍarīka*)—in the manner contrary to those of a false layman, namely:

<u>Qualities of a true lay person</u>	<u>Dharma quality</u>
(1) He has faith.	faith (<i>saddhā</i>)
(2) He is morally virtuous.	moral virtue (<i>sīla</i>)
(3) He does not believe in rituals to invoke luck.	wisdom (<i>paññā</i>)
(4) He relies on karma, not on luck.	effort (<i>virīya</i>)
(5) He does not seek the gift-worthy outside the Teaching but gives his priority here (in the Teaching). [§2] ⁸	charity (<i>cāga</i>)

3.2 SPIRITUAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

3.2.1 The (Upāsaka, sampadā) Mahānāma Sutta (S 55.37) lists the spiritual accomplishments (*sampadā*) of a true lay follower (*upāsaka*) as follows:

(1) Accomplishment in moral virtue,	(<i>sīla, sampadā</i>)	
(2) Accomplishment in faith,	(<i>saddhā, sampadā</i>)	
(3) Accomplishment in generosity, and	(<i>cāga, sampadā</i>)	
(4) Accomplishment in wisdom.	(<i>paññā, sampadā</i>)	(S 55.37/5:395), SD 6.2

The Sutta then helpfully defines each of these four qualities.

3.2.2 Only “effort” (*virīya*) seems to be missing from this list. This quality, however, can be said to underlie all the 4 accomplishments. However, in the Caṇḍāla Sutta (A 5.175), effort is highlighted as a separate item because its list of qualities is only a preliminary one, compared to the accomplishments of the (Upāsaka, sampadā) Mahānāma Sutta [3.2.1].

3.3 STREAMWINNING. The purpose of being a Buddhist lay follower surely should be to at least better ourselves spiritually. Ideally, we should aspire to attain awakening in this life itself. If we are still unawakened at the point of dying, and we are still driven by craving and ignorance, then we are likely to be reborn in some subhuman realm, where spiritual practice is impossible, and from which it is extremely difficult to emerge.

Hence, it makes good sense that we should at least aspire to attain streamwinning, if not once-return, in this life itself. Only ignorance and delusion prevent us from realizing how easy this can be. We only need to look at any of the 10 suttas of **the Okkanti Saṃyutta** (S 25),⁹ which advises us to practise the perception of impermanence, either through faith or through wisdom.¹⁰

It is clear then that the true lay follower, especially if he is a **streamwinner**, is not superstitious. The third fetter—attachment to rituals and vows—in essence refers to relying on external means of dealing with problems, instead of looking within and understanding the nature of the mind, and dealing directly with it at the source (*yoniso, manasikāra*).

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⁸ For a similar list, see **Parihāna S** (A 7.27/4:25), also called Hani S, and **(Upāsaka) Parābhava S** (A 5.176/-4:26). See SD 12.14 (2). See also **Kiñci Saṅkhāra S** (A 6.93), SD 12.14.

⁹ See esp **(Anicca) Cakkhu S** (S 25.1), SD 16.7.

¹⁰ See **Entering the stream**, SD 3.3.

The Discourse on the Outcaste

A 5.175

- 1 Bhikshus, a lay follower with 5 qualities is
 an outcaste [chandala] lay follower, (upāsaka, caṇḍāla)
 a stained lay follower, (upāsaka, mala)
 an inferior lay follower.¹¹ (upāsaka, patikiṭṭha)
- What are the five?
- 1.2 (1) He lacks faith. assaddho hoti
 (2) He is not morally virtuous. dussīlo hoti
 (3) He believes in rituals to invoke luck. kotūhala, maṅgaliko hoti
 (4) He relies on luck, not on karma. maṅgalaṃ pacceti no kammaṃ
 (5) He seeks the gift-worthy outside the ito ca bahiddhā dakkhiṇeyyaṃ gavesati
 Teaching and gives his priority there. tattha ca pubba, kāraṃ karoti
- 2 Bhikshus, a lay follower with 5 qualities is¹²
 a jewel of a lay follower, (upāsaka, ratana)
 a lotus¹³ of lay follower, (upāsaka, paduma)
 a white lotus of a lay follower. (upāsaka, puṇḍarīka)
- What are the five?
- 2.2 (1) He has faith. saddho hoti
 (2) He is morally virtuous. sīlavā hoti
 (3) He believes not in rituals that invoke luck. akotūhala, maṅgaliko hoti
 (4) He relies on karma, not on luck. kammaṃ pacceti no maṅgalaṃ
 (5) He seeks the gift-worthy within the na ito bahiddhā dakkhiṇeyyaṃ gavesati
 Teaching and gives his priority here. idha ca pubba, kāraṃ karoti

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¹¹ *Pañcahi bhikkhave dhammehi samannāgato upāsako upāsaka, caṇḍālo ca hoti upāsaka, malaṅ ca upāsaka, patikiṭṭho ca* [only Be *upāsaka, patikiṭṭho ca*]. **Patikiṭṭha**, “inferior, low, vile” (A 1:15×3, 286, 3:272; VA 3:665; UA 236; *patikiṭṭha, tara*: M 2:35, 42, DhA 2:3). **Patikuṭṭha** (from *paṭikkosati*, “to revile, blame, scorn”) means “scorned, miserable, blameworthy”; more common is opp *apatikuṭṭha*, “blameless, faultless,” S 3:71-73; A 4:246; Kvu 141, 341].

¹² This whole line: *Pañcahi bhikkhave dhammehi samannāgato upāsako upāsaka, ratanaṅ ca hoti upāsaka, padumaṅ ca upāsaka, puṇḍarīkaṅ ca* [Be:Ka Ee *upāsaka, puṇḍarīko ca*].

¹³ “Lotus,” *paduma* (Skt *padma*), properly, blue lotus; *uppala* (Skt *utpala*), red-and-blue lotus; and *puṇḍarīka*, white lotus. There are 2 kinds of *padumā*, ie the red (*ratta, paduma*, VvA 191; PvA 157) and the white (*seta, paduma*) (J 5:37; SnA 125). Also mentioned is the “five-coloured lotus” (*pañca, vaṇṇa, paduma*, J 1:222, 5:337, 6:341; VvA 41). They are further classified as 100-petalled (*sata, patta*) and 1000-petalled (*sahassa, patta*) (VvA 191) (*patta* here lit tr as “leaves”); the usual word for “petal” is *dala*, which can also mean “leaf.” Used in simile for the 3rd dhyana in **Sāmañña, phala S** (D 2,82/1:75), SD 8.10, **Kāya, gatā, sati S** (M 119,20/3:93 f), SD 12.21 & **Āyācana S** (S 6.1) where the simile of lotuses in a pond is applied to beings of different spiritual dispositions (S 6.1/1:138), SD 12.2.